

it would be appropriate to let the authorizing committee have a shot at this to take a look at the problem before we move to address it on the House floor in an appropriations bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 7 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. SHERMAN).

(Mr. SHERMAN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, we need to defeat this rule so that I can offer an amendment to simply say that no committee in any year can spend more than \$25,000 on just postage. That would be \$50,000 a Congress. Why would such a limit be needed? Why is the \$25,000 limit needed? After all, in the year 2002, the average committee spent only \$2,104 on postage. The largest amount spent by any committee during the 107th Congress on an annualized basis was \$6,807.

I know the gentlewoman from New York cited the amounts requested by committees. They requested a bit more than these figures. But when we look at what they actually spent, no committee needed to spend in the average year more than \$6,807 in the 107th Congress.

But a new phenomenon has arisen. The Committee on Resources has decided it needs more resources. In the 107th Congress it spent \$2,483 per year on postage. For the 108th Congress they requested a quarter million dollars per year for postage; \$500,000, half a million dollars, for the whole 108th Congress.

Think of this from a fiscal responsibility standpoint. That is a 4,445 percent increase over what they requested before. Maybe that is not too bad. After all, 4,445 percent increase in the cost of a government agency, no fiscally responsible person would object to that. But do not compare it to what they requested last Congress. Compare it to what they actually spent. Then it is a 9,968 percent increase. Maybe somebody with some fiscal conservatism would be concerned about that, a committee which in the last Congress spent \$2,483 on postage now wants to spend \$250,000 on postage.

We do not know what they are spending all this money for. It is hard to get the information. But we do know that last quarter, just in 3 months, the committee spent \$49,587 on postage, and when they spend money on postage, they inevitably have to spend money on printing, and, yes, they spent \$40,732 on printing.

What did they use the money for? Not to carry on committee business in the sense of telling the press what the committee is doing, writing to experts to see if they can gather information. This is not individually sent-out letters, no. These were mass mailings into individual Members' districts, \$250,000 per year. What kind of mailings went out? Here is an example that was referred to by the gentlewoman from

New York. We will see that this mailing went out to Arizona. Our information is that it went it to the gentleman from Arizona's (Mr. RENZI) district, who happens to be one of the most targeted Members in the entire Congress by one political party. It praises three Members of the Arizona delegation for cosponsoring a bill, and if we read it very carefully, it attacks or implicitly criticizes a fourth Member of the Arizona delegation for not cosponsoring this bill. I might add it is a terrible bill, but the mailing praises those who cosponsor it. Our information is that it went just to the gentleman from Arizona's (Mr. RENZI) district; so the fact that it implicitly criticizes the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GRIJALVA) is not of great significance unless he has statewide ambitions I am unaware of.

In any case, what does this mailing do? It lauds a Member. Some of these mailings are going out in violation or possible violation of the blackout period. So we are used to not sending out mailings 90 days before an election. Apparently the committee chairmen can. This mailing seems rather benign in that it lauds a Member, and it does so only on one issue.

Mark my words: If we do not draw the line now, the next piece will be a hit piece, and it will not be limited to one issue. It will not even be limited to a committee's jurisdiction. It will be an attack piece sent out a day or a week before an election.

How is this all different from the Member communications that we are aware of? Because many of us send mail to our constituents. First, a Member gets a limited Members' representational allowance. We are responsible to our districts, to the recipients of that mail. If the mail is informative, then I can tell my constituents we sent them informative mail that came out of our budget, which we could otherwise have used to hire personnel. But a committee chairman is not responsible to the people who receive the mailing, so they could look at it and say this is wildly uninformative. It is a terrible waste of money. It says it was paid for at taxpayer expense. I do not like it, but it does not matter because my Member did not send it. It comes out of the budget of some Washington committee.

Second, the MRA funds are at least distributed relatively equally by party. Each Member gets their own account. This \$500,000 went solely to one political party. And it is not just \$500,000. If we do not draw the line now, it will be 5 million, it will be 25 million. It will not be one committee; it will be every committee.

Members also know what information their constituents need to receive. Committee chairmen, with all due respect to the gentleman from California (Mr. POMBO), I do not think he is an expert at what information people in the gentleman from Arizona's (Mr. RENZI) district need to hear. Then we are going to be told that these are to an-

nounce field hearings. I might add this piece of mail has nothing to do with any field hearing. But we could have a rule that we have these slush funds, but only if we are announcing a field hearing.

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A field hearing should be a field hearing, not an excuse for propaganda, not a district-wide town hall on behalf of an endangered Member or a targeted Member.

Finally, I know here in Washington that our targeted watchdog groups publish lists. They criticize those who spend money on postage and printing. They wonder whether that is a good use of government resources.

Well, wait a minute. None of these groups caught this. They will attack a Member for spending \$100,000 on postage. How about \$250,000 on postage?

We need to do something about it, and we need to do something about it today. If you vote for this rule, you are voting for giant political slush funds, not just of half a million dollars, but for as large as they are done by whichever party controls this House. You cannot say you are going to deal with it tomorrow if you vote against dealing with it today. Vote against the rule.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that the gentleman came very close to impugning the motives of the chairman and the actions of the committee. I would just suggest that he tread a bit more lightly on that.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY), the ranking member of the Committee on Appropriations.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, all I can say in response to the last comment is if the committees adhere more closely to the spirit of the rules of the House, maybe we will not tread so closely in questioning their motives.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, I am not going to vote for this bill, and I am not going to vote for it for two reasons.

Number one, we have the continued saga of that ridiculous hole out in front of the Capitol, the Capitol Visitors Center. You remember back in the good old days when we had a budget surplus, and then we were told by the Republican majority that we could pass \$6 trillion in tax cuts and still have money left over? Now we have dug ourselves into a huge deficit hole again, the biggest deficit in the history of the country. That hole in front of the Capitol, created for the construction of the so-called visitors center, really, in my view, is a symbol of what we have done to the Nation as a whole. We have dug a huge hole for the Nation.

In this case, in the case of the visitors center, you have an addition to the Capitol which started out to cost